

ITAnalysis - Mobile 'bill of rights' or 'mobile bill' of wrongs?

By Rob Bamforth, Principal analyst, Quocirca Ltd

'Mobilising the workforce', 'mobile enterprise' and simply 'mobility' have all been included in taglines for marketing programmes over recent years, and with so much emphasis on this whole area from the technology sector, one could be forgiven for thinking that humans had only just recently developed legs.

The truth is that few jobs require the individual to be fixed or tethered in a single location, but many are constrained by some physical resources they need to perform their functions. In the past, this has included access to information and other people. The difference that IT and communications (ITC) makes is that this is no longer a constraint for many working processes.

It was not always like this. When IT first appeared in the workplace as mainframes, they sat in machine rooms and were accessed remotely through paper tapes and punch cards, used through intermediary computer operators. Even when computers had interactive screens and PCs started to appear, these resources were so precious that they sat in specific locations away from employees' desks and their use was generally shared.

To ensure all those in offices could communicate with even distant colleagues a phone was provided at the desk – not always the place of work even for 'office' workers. Anyone away from their desk or travelling beyond the premises would need to travel back to their desk or find a publically accessible phone to make contact. In emergencies – corporate or personal, major or minor – they could not be reached, except by tannoy systems in larger facilities and eventually pagers, which told the person to find a phone and phone in.

It might sound like ancient history to some present day workers, but it was the daily working experience of many of those currently in the positions of senior managers and decision makers.

So has this past experience led to a disconnect between mobile strategy and tactical reality? Yes.

The problem is that the rapid evolution of ITC into something highly personal and mobile has overtaken the pragmatic necessity of basic business decision making. Too many in the workforce – from senior managers adopting the BlackBerry and iPhone as status symbols, to the juniors with Twitter and Facebook habits to feed – have become overly enamoured with the technology and lost sight of what they are there to do – support the processes of working.

Of course these involve access to information and other people, and the great value of present day technology is that it liberates both. Workers do not have to be 'mobile' to reap the benefits, because it is the interaction with the business process that can now flexibly move to the point where it is best delivered.

Or at least, that is the theory.

The difficulty is that not only does the technology aspect over-dominate, but most business processes, their management and the people involved have been blinkered to adapt to cope with the lack of flexibility that existed before mobile technologies came about. Business processes are often not mobile 'friendly', nor even mobile aware.

On the flip side, mobile technologies provide so much freedom with flexible connectivity and are desired by the workforce because this is the manner of interaction they are familiar with from their experiences as consumers. This raises the risk of over-indulgence of non-work related activities and the abuse of corporate supplied mobile resources.

Working from home is then seen as a 'skiver's charter'; 'presentee-ism' becomes rife in times of tension; performance management is not designed for remote operation; silos of information (power) have tight access controls.

Data leaks need preventing, mobile bills are escalating, consumer technology is hitting the workplace and the traditional processes cannot cope.

The emphasis needs to shift - at the boardroom level and all the way to the end user - away from technology, its costs, constraints and desirability to the people and processes the business needs to support. This is a shift away from regarding mobile as an 'add-on', to a view that sees it as core to working practices in a similar way to how it has become fundamental to employees as consumers outside of work.

This does not mean a blanket abdication of ownership of the issue by employees - with the great power of mobile connectivity comes great responsibility - and their un-tethered mobile 'rights' need to come with some strings attached to ensure the balance between work and life is fair.

One aspect of mobile use that is particularly relevant to this responsibility is the way social networking is becoming pervasive in work as well as home life and this is explored further in Quocirca's free to download report "[Limiting social networking's abuse of mobile bills](#)"

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

<http://www.quocirca.com>